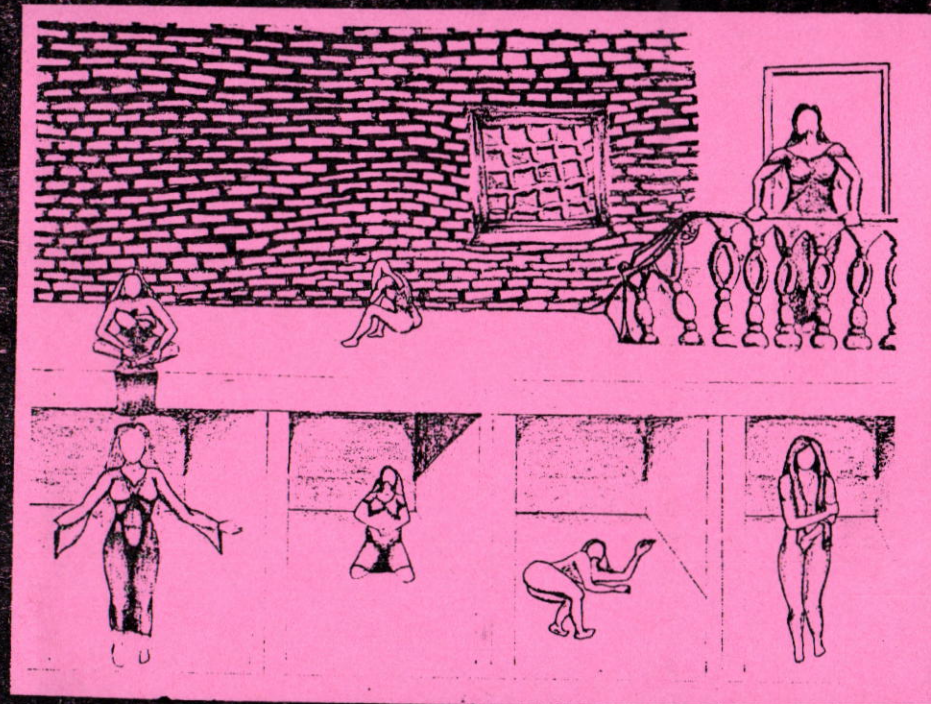


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# TENACIOUS

art & writings by women in prison



Issue 6

Fall 2003



# WHAT IS A TENACIOUS WOMAN?

by: Barrilee 'Gispert' Bannister  
#11309597

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PO Box 9000  
Wilsonville, OR 97070

A tenacious woman possesses the will to make no compromise with wrong. She cannot be bought off to remain silent when faced with injustices. She does not hesitate to take chances, and she is not ashamed or afraid to stand up for the truth when it is unpopular. She does not lose her individuality in a crowd of faces, and she never quits because others disagree with her. She knows that her choices in life obligate no one but her, and she learns from her mistakes. She grows by her own efforts to succeed, and she is proud to stand alone knowing that she is a woman.

Are you a tenacious woman?

Tolerating injustice is an invitation to be enslaved.  
Faith is holding on to the truth in a world of deception.  
Success is never the problem; it's what one succeeds at that can be a problem.  
Progress is to be encouraged and respected, even if it is slow.  
The more aware you are, the less you can be brainwashed.  
Dedication and choice destroys obstacles.

cover art by Kristen "Hoopa" Marshall, #14280392  
PO Box 9000, Wilsonville, OR 97070

Tenacious is looking for articles, poetry and art from women in prison. We associated with Tenacious strongly believe that everyone has a story to tell, something to share and are in need of someone who will listen and offer some kind of support and/or understanding. It is important to us that women (in and out of prison) find the power of their voice. We encourage women to share with us and others in the hopes of educating those in society and to empower other women to take a stand for their rights and the rights of others. Use the power of your voice in a positive way—to educate.

Subjects we are looking for include:

- Prison programs (how they do or don't work)
- Mothers educating their children while on the inside
- Holding prison officials accountable for their actions or inactions
- Observations and applications on prison life
- Women prisoners uniting to make a difference
- Informing society about prison issues
- What it is to be a woman in today's society or in prison
- Sexual discrimination or sexual preference discrimination in your prison
- Medical breakthroughs or neglect
- HIV, Hepatitis C and other diseases common in prison
- Helping your fellow prisoners
- Literacy and education
- Your job (or lack of a job)
- Sorry, we do not publish women's individual cases, charges or court experiences. We also cannot act as liaisons between those in different facilities.

Send submissions to:  
V. Law, PO Box 20388  
New York, NY 10009



## *Writing Is...*

Writing is a way to pass time, to escape the confines of prison, and the debilitating ailments of prison life. If I can write about what happens in my world, and about what I am surrounded by on a daily basis, I can in some way put on my boxing gloves and enter the ring; and in many ways, fight and win. Writing helps to lift the reluctance to attack the corruption, deception, disorder, intimidation, oppression and violence that not only plagues the prison system, but also many aspects of this world and inside my mind. It is a way to free myself, and share with others my thoughts, opinions, ideas, like and dislikes. Writing, to me, is freedom.

Barrilee Bannister #11309597



## COFFEE CREEK CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: A Real Shit Hole

On August 13, 2003 at 3pm, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility's EVAC (plumbing system) went down. All plumbing was turned off in all the cells and the units throughout the entire facility.

Inmates were told about this approximately an hour after the fact. Several cells, therefore, had feces and urine in the toilets. Within one and a half hours, the smell was horrific. Myself, as well as other inmates, asked the prison officials to bring in wet racks so we could remove what had accumulated in the toilets prior to our being told that the plumbing system wasn't working. Prison officials refused to do this simple task even though there were several wet racks in the maintenance department.

At the 10pm cell in for the evening, inmates requested to use the out houses that the prison officials had brought into the recreation yards at approximately 8:30pm. The prison officials denied this request as well.

At 10:50 count cleared, and all the inmates on G Unit started banging on their cell doors, demanding to use the toilets.

By this point, our toilets were overflowing with blood, urine, and feces. A putrid odor spread throughout the facility, leading to headaches and vomiting among several inmates.

Later, at 11:26pm, prison officials decided to take one cell (two inmates) at a time to use the out houses. Note: this was only after the majority of inmates started causing a ruckus by banging on their cell doors and yelling.

The next morning it was clear that more inmates were becoming ill due to the stench. Myself, inmates Christine Foos, and several others began to make phone calls on our pre-paid debit calling cards and collect calls to several news organizations (channel 2 and channel 8), as well as the ACLU in Eugene, OR.

As of noon, the toilets to the cells were filled to their brims. There was urine, feces, blood, and vomit. There was still no running water, and bathroom breaks to be let outside and use the out houses were only permitted every three and a half to four hours. Several inmates requested that the unit doors to the

yards be left open during count time so that fresh air could circulate through the units. This also was denied. We were then told that it would probably take another two days or so for the problem to be fixed.

One high ranking prison official was reported to have remarked that us inmates should just riot.

...As the temperature rises, so does the stench from the filled up toilets in our cells.

Inmates' Eighth Amendment Constitutional rights continue to be violated here.

All in all- it's just another couple days at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility- A Real Shit Hole.

Barrilee Bannister  
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Wilsonville, OR 97070

## RESOURCES FOR WOMEN IN PRISON

### *OFF OUR BACKS*

2337B 18th St. NW  
Washington DC 20009  
A radical feminist newsjournal free to women in prison.

### LARRY-BOB

Box 590488  
San Francisco, CA 94159  
Offers pen-pal ads in his zine free of charge to "LGBT and other prisoners"

### *SINISTER WISDOM*

P.O. Box 3252  
Berkeley CA 94703  
*SW* publishes work by lesbians only - prose, poetry, essays, graphics, and book reviews. Free to women in prison.

### HEPATITIS C AWARENESS PROJECT

P.O. Box 41803  
Eugene OR 97404  
Offers free hepatitis C information packets and also hepatitis C newsletter called *HEPATITIS C AWARENESS NEWS*.

### Contact Referral Center, INC

PO Box 81826  
Lincoln, NE 68501  
*Publishes a survival source book to help prisoners with post release survival including finding a job and a place to live.*

### Nat'l Clearinghouse in Defense of Battered Women

125 S 9<sup>th</sup> St Suite 302  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Information, referrals, & legal assistance for battered women.  
Does a lot of work with prisoners. Free newsletter.

What is needed is a mandate for change. Change in our sentencing laws that adopt purely punitive sentencing for crime and change in policies and priorities to provide more support for women and children. If the money can be found to build new prisons (approximately \$150-200,000 per bed), why not redirect this money for programs?

It is time, as incarcerated women, that we think about the following questions:

- 1- Did the increase in women's incarceration parallel an increase in female crime, or does it result from a change in sentencing guidelines?
- 2- Are prison sentences always needed for women, or would community placements in many cases be more appropriate?
- 3- Where are the programs needed for women who must support themselves or their children upon release?
- 4- Will litigation benefit or endanger the existing programs that are available now for women?
- 5- Does an entirely new philosophy to help incarcerated women need to be developed and implemented?

Midge DeLuca  
405396  
SBI #000471537A  
EMCW/ A. Cottage  
PO Box 4004  
Clinton, NJ 08809

## WHO SAID THAT I COULDN'T?

Who said I couldn't DANCE

As a caterpillar on its hind legs

Or as a queen bee buzzing around her honeyed comb?

*I can dance to the sunset in a brush of darkness.*

*I can. I can.*

Who said I couldn't FLY

As butterfly out from a larva stage

Or an airplane fully fueled?

*I can fly into the heavens with no judgement*

*pronounced*

*upon me.*

*I can. I can. I can.*

Who said I couldn't SING

As Whitney Houston putting out platinum hits

Or Kirk Franklin spreading God's word with an angelic tune?

*I can sing to a mockingbird in the trenches of  
sound.*

*I can. I can. I can.*

Who said I couldn't WRITE

As Maya Angelou printing "Still I Rise"

Or as my make believe friend did when I was a child?

*I can write to a mystery in a novel land.*

*I can. I can. I can.*



WHO said I couldn't.  
And what a tangled web WHO weaves.  
Because I can do things that WHO can't believe.  
WHO can't dance, fly, write, or sing.  
WHO really can't do anything.

And I can.

Ms G. Kelley-Darden WB1216  
CCW# B506-21-2up  
PO Box 1508  
Chowchilla, CA 93610-1508

## Are We Doing Justice to Incarcerated Women?

I figured that after being here for 2 1/2 years after never having been incarcerated, I should start to learn the history of women's incarceration in this country. What I discovered totally disturbed me. The first sentence in a book by Pollock-Byrne (1990 Edition) states three basic facts that characterize women's institutions: They are smaller than male prisons, there are fewer of them, and they are different from prisons for males. Except for a few states, like Texas and California, most states have one or two female institutions. This means that all custody grades and all variety of offenders are housed together. Security is therefore set at the highest level for all offenders!

Women also have fewer vocational or treatment programs offered to us than to men. Although this fact has been increasingly challenged in court, programs continue to be sex-stereotyped. Many institutions for women are currently developing programs for cosmetology, office skills, and food service. But what is missing and needed are the non-traditional programs that can help a woman achieve economic self-sufficiency upon release. This is especially true for women who have children and are likely to be the primary caretakers for these children upon release. How is the system helping these women?

Today, there are more women being sent to prison than there are beds available. (Housing all custody grades of female offenders together often results in over-crowding). But the increase of incarceration is not a response to a more violent female criminal (Chesney-Lind, 1998). The picture being painted to the American public is that female criminals pose a greater risk to the public today than those of years past. However, while the female criminal is being characterized as typically more violent, most incarcerated women are currently serving for property crime and drug offenses (Caesner-Lind, 1995).

# SEEING INSTEAD

In the corner of my eye  
A tree branch arched  
Above the fencing  
It's leaves dancing  
And then I turned

Seeing Instead

A woven, coiling wire  
Thorned with glinting razor  
Laughing in cold mockery

Destinni Mardesich  
W-75738  
CCWF  
PO Box 1508  
Chowchilla, CA  
93610



Artwork by Gretchen Schumacher, #6732990  
Coffee Creek Correctional Facility  
PO Box 9000  
Wilsonville, OR 97070

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Written by an Anonymous Mother

In the beginning, there was chaos.  
Schemes of romance and sexual madness...  
It was raw and filled with never ending  
excitement.

Then arguments  
Arose out of nowhere.  
An argument here  
And an argument there.

I should have got out then...

I:

It was when I continued to be Me  
and not conform to his beliefs, ideas,  
and opinions that I first felt the  
stirrings of conflict rising. I stayed  
though, thinking I was living in love.  
Then slowly, as the days turned into  
weeks and the weeks into months, fear  
found its way into my life. I felt  
helpless and vulnerable. He told me that  
he would never allow me to leave. If I  
tried, he said, he would surely find me  
and kill me. There was no safe way  
out. It was like walking a tight rope  
with no safety net underneath. No sense  
of security at my feet.



Then pregnancy came about, and for a time the arguments ceased. But within nine months came the put downs and verbal abuse again. What self-esteem I had, he squashed. I knew that my visions of being a wholesome family were nothing but a big fat illusion festering in sin. Family and friends told me to get out then while I still could.

He promised he would change his ways and I gave him the benefit of the doubt, thinking I could change him. I stayed and I thought, "Wow, this is great!", because for a while he did just that. And we walked down the aisle of wishful wedding bliss.

## II:

Then the day came when his huge fists fiercely plundered into my face as I held our child in my arms. I held onto my child- my precious jewel- as I crumbled to the floor. By the grace of God none of the vicious blows reached her. I stayed to the floor, became one with it, as it was the only protection for us. It seemed like forever that I lay there beaten black and blue with blood pouring from many wounds that I did not yet know existed, but could feel. Finally he stopped, and then the door to the house slammed shut. I heard the engine to the car start and the tires squeal as he peeled out of the driveway. Then, and only then, did I pick myself up off the floor, with my child still in my arms.

THOUGHTS  
By Barriee Gispert Bannister

Some Thoughts  
Are Like Weeds  
Some Are  
Like Flowers  
Some Can  
Poison The Mind  
Body And Spirit,  
Like

Amica,  
Autumn Crocus,  
Belladonna,  
Foxglove,  
Lobelia,  
Yohimbe,  
Others Can  
Heal And Revitalize  
Mind, Body And Spirit,  
Like

Alice Vera,  
Comfrey,  
Echinacea,  
Eucalyptus,  
Hibiscus,  
Ginseng,  
Where Are  
Your Thoughts?  
Blooming Or Withering?  
The Garden Wall  
Is Adorned  
Can You Make  
The Leap  
Over It?  
Once Inside  
Which Path  
Do You Take?  
The One  
Where Demons Lurk?  
Or

Where Angels Abide?  
Which Path  
Whispers About Your Pleasures?  
Shouts About Your Pains?  
Are Your Thoughts  
Downcast Into  
The River Of Purgatory?  
Or

Rising Up  
Into The  
Celestial Air?  
Do You Know  
Your Thoughts,  
Whether  
On High  
Or  
Low Land?  
In Brightness  
Or  
Gloom?  
Enter  
The Garden  
At Your  
Own Risk  
Where Thoughts  
Can Withier  
Or  
Bloom



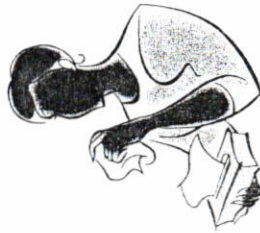
out of her body.....I'm so sorry I hurt you and made  
you cry momma.

My: Selena "Spirit" Mendez

#11407768

P.O. Box 9000

Wilsonville, OR 97070



Frantically I checked her over to make sure she was okay. She was my main concern. I held her to my breast to calm her as I made my way to a mirror to survey the damage. What I saw as my reflection was a disaster. And as I stared at my reflection, a drop of blood fell from my damaged face and made its way to my child's cheek. I stared at it and thought "BLOOD TEARS ARE NOT WHAT I WISH TO SHED."

### III:

The voices inside my head began to collaborate with one another. "KILL HIM!, KILL HIM!"; "LEAVE HIM!"; "GET OUT!"; "RUN!, RUN!". I was so lost and confused. I didn't know what to do, so I lifted my voice in prayer. "God give me a way out. Lead me down a path to safety. Please, I beg of you."

### IV:

...There was a knock at the door. As I answered it, a sense of calm took over my entire being and the fear that was so immense dissolved with enormous speed. I opened the door to find a State Trooper in a rain slicker drenched from head to toe.

He said, "Are you Mrs Doe?" I asked if there was some kind of problem here.

"Are you married to a Mr John Doe?"  
"Yes I am", I responded in a quiet voice.



"Well Mrs Doe, there has been an accident down the road and you'll need to come with me to identify the body."

V:

We got into the State Troopers car and drove to the morgue where I made a positive ID on my husband's body. His body was in worse shape than mine. It made me feel a lot better.

The State Trooper then took my child and me to the hospital and asked us brief questions.

-Was my husband drinking?-

"yes, he was drinking, and after he was done he beat my ass for no reason."

"I guess his death is not a hard thing for you then?"

"His death is mine and my child's freedom," I responded. I thanked him as he dropped us off at our home.

"I hope you and your child the best in your new found freedom", he said.

"Have a good life!"

Several years have passed as I tell this story. My child has graduated high school and gone to college. In those years I never brought up the past abuse or the death of her father. I never mentioned his name. Yet as the years passed she was subjected to abuse from her boyfriend. The way she got out was not through prayer, but through shooting her abuser. She is now in

## I once saw a woman cry

I once saw a woman crying because her man was being taken to jail. I felt sad for her because you could just see the pain and hurt it was causing her.

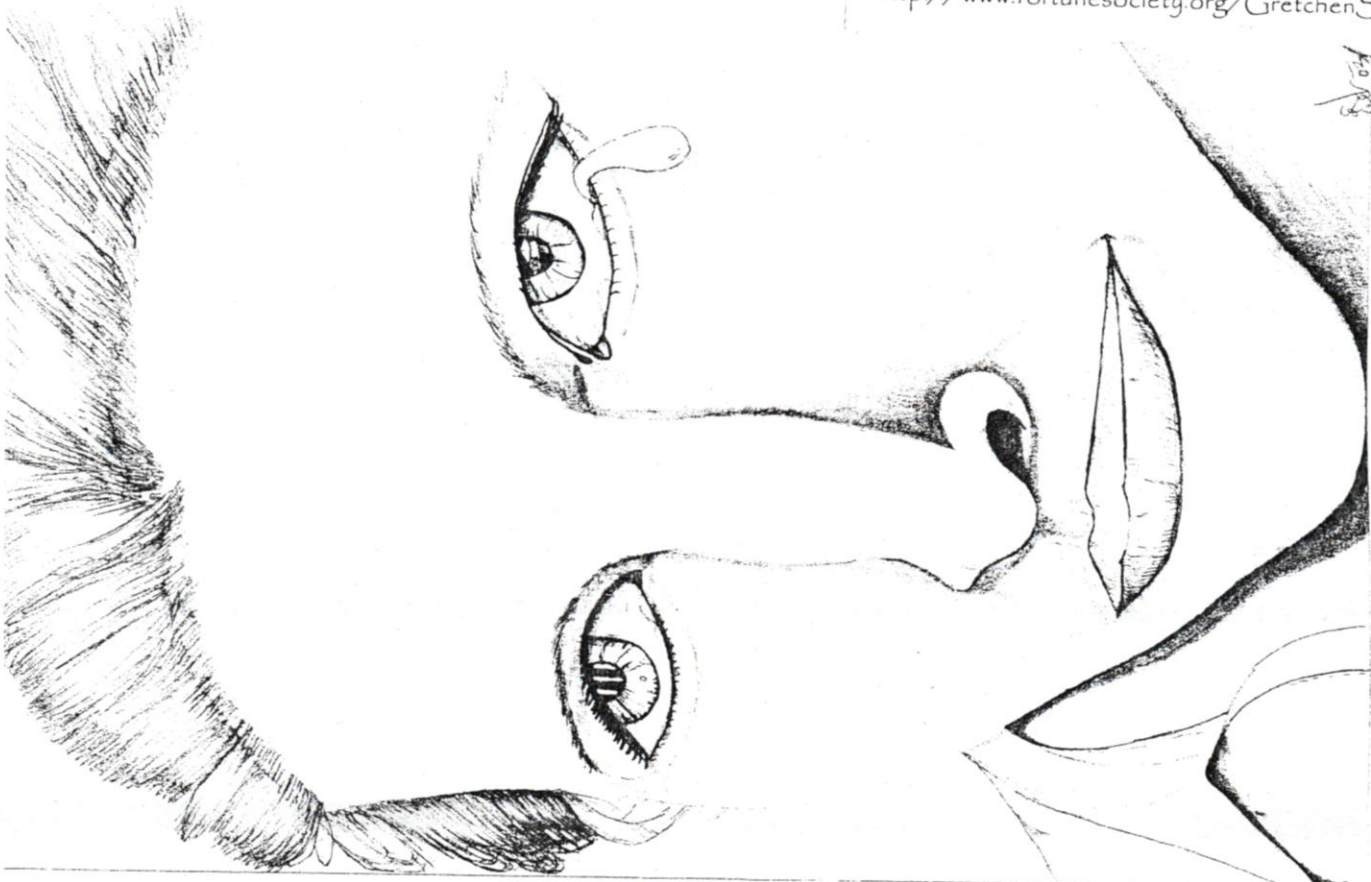
I have been through a lot of relationships, long term and short but have yet to find "true love". I always felt like I was always the one to be left out of everything. All my sisters and brothers have kids, wives and husbands and I have nothing. They have freedom, happiness and a wonderful life with their families; I have a four cornered cell with a broken toilette that keeps me awake all night before having to go to work the next morning.

I once "thought" I was in love, but realized that it was only "convenience". I didn't "love to be with that person, I was just used to it.

I have been through tough times in my life, beatings, stabbings, shootings, deaths, incarceration, loss of friends and family, drugs and alcohol. But I "am" a survivor I have held on to life even though life did nothing but hurt me over and over again.

I once saw a woman crying because her baby girl was being sent to prison for many years, the pain in her eyes was unbearable to watch. Her lips quivered and tears poured down her face. It looked as if her life was being ripped right





prison for manslaughter doing twelve years.

As I get dressed to make the 3 hour drive to visit her, I thought I would briefly tell my story. If only I had spoke out afterwards and started to educate her and other women, perhaps she would not have been abused. And perhaps she would not be in prison right now. Since she has been in prison I have begun to learn as much as I can about domestic violence. This is what I have learned and would like to share with you.

Domestic violence is physically or emotionally harmful acts between husbands and wives or between other individuals in intimate relationships.

Forms of abuse are:

- Emotional abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Denial of access to recourses
- Denial of access to money
- Restraint of normal activities
- Restraint of freedom
- Isolation from friends and family
- Sexual coercion and assault
- Threats to kill or harm

More of Gretchen's work can also be viewed at:  
<http://www.fortunesociety.org/GretchenSchumacher.htm>

Artwork by Gretchen Schumacher, #6732990  
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➤ Physical intimidation or attacks

Not every woman and/or child is lucky enough to get out. Prayers are not always answered. Women must help themselves before it is too late, because domestic violence can lead to death.

Spouses that abuse once, often repeat abuse- despite pleas of how sorry they are and how it will never happen again. Believe me, the sad story is, that it often does.

Since 1964, more than 1800 shelters or refuges for battered women have been established in the US. Programs and services are available in all 50 states. Most are listed in the Yellow Pages, or information can be gathered on them from police departments, churches, and a range of public places. Most of these services offer programs for both victims and offenders to treat and prevent domestic violence.

The laws of all fifty states provide that domestic violence is a crime. These laws make it easier for victims to obtain protective/restraining orders that prohibit offenders from making contact with them. Additionally, most states now allow police officers to arrest people suspected of domestic violence without the victim having to file charges.

In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act, which authorized more than \$800 million in federal funds for state and local

Precious Moments

Precious moments can never be lost or forgotten. Being a mother of three lovely daughters and a grandmother of four, I have learned to cherish all the moments of our lives. My daughters are my light at the end of this long and dark tunnel of despair.

I am currently serving a life sentence at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. Being away from my family is the hardest things I have ever had to face. Consequently, my girls are also serving a life sentence. My inability to successfully conquer drug addiction has placed all of us behind the bars of this cruel society. However, today my girls always know where I am.

Having only one visit per month is never going to be enough time for me to spend with my babies nor can a fifteen-minute phone call suffice either. The hurt my daughters are experiencing comes out in their voices over the phone and in their saddened faces when they have to leave me behind is the most hurtful thing ever. The waves from my grandchildren as they walk out of my sight, knowing that it will be thirty days before I can embrace them again, makes my heart hurt.

Nevertheless, I am fortunate to have such precious moments. The gift of my family makes my life worth living today, even behind these bars.

Anita Samuels 51397  
A-10 R W  
1479 Collins Avenue  
Marysville, OH 43040

In September, I seen my twenty-year-old son come through the prison next door, the men's facility, DRDC. We serve the men food. I was full of sorrow and hurt. As he came through the window to get his tray, he said "Hi Mamma" and I cried and I said to myself, "He called me Mamma. I am a mother."

They sent him off to another facility and I pray that we'll be together soon. He doesn't have much time, very little, but sometimes I feel that he did what he did to be closer to me or to feel closer to me.

What DOC system has done to me violated my rights of not allowing me treatment when I needed it before. I still fight cause God said faith without works is dead. If some of you unbelievers don't know what that means, it means that God said "Don't give up."

Achell Pack  
98154  
Colorado Dept of Corrections  
Unit 2-117  
Box 392005  
Denver, CO 80239

programs to combat domestic violence. This makes it a federal crime for a person to travel from one state to another in order to violate a restraining order. It also prohibits the individual who is subject to a restraining order from possessing firearms.

There are many ways out of an abusive relationship other than turning into an abuser yourself. Taking justice into your own hands by killing your abuser, like my daughter did, often leads to more problems such as being arrested and possibly a lengthy stay of time in prison. The safest way, believe it or not, is to call the police.

Obtain a restraining order and get yourself assistance from a local program dealing with domestic violence. The safest way out is the legal way out. At least in my opinion it is.





# DID YOU KNOW???

NADINE ANDERSEN

"Woman are indoctrinated with the notion that women are only valuable if; a) they are with a man, either married or in a relationship or b) they want to be in a relationship and c) they have children. In addition family looms large in our culture. The threat of losing a family is a grievous one. Women are taught to believe that they are responsible for their family and charged with its health and well-being. Society teaches women to be nurturing, caring and self-sacrificing. Women are taught to put their partners and children's welfare above their own."

"In return these beliefs have worked against women who become trapped by violent men. So, when a woman does what she is taught to do (stand by their man, take care of the children) they are blamed for staying. They are labeled & in some cases even prosecuted as masochistic and codependent."

Women Stay? By Susan McGee The Domestic Violence Project Inc SAFE House 1995

One question people often ask me is; "If the man is so violent why doesn't the woman leave?" That's a good question. It might sound really simple but when it comes down to the safety of the children and yourself you might have a tiny bit of a problem on your hands for it is extremely dangerous to "just leave." But, it's more complicated then the average "normal" person would think. I have compiled data that I obtained from a few agencies. You might get a better understanding of the reasons why.

There are several factors to consider when a woman is in a violent relationship and attempts to leave:

1. *Her life may be threatened and she feels that nobody will listen to her.*
2. *The abuser threatens to kill her and her children.*
3. *She does confront friends and family and they DON'T believe her.*
4. *She seriously believes that she can help her partner.*

"The victims need to survive is stronger than his (sic) impulse to hate the person who has created his (sic) dilemma (Strents 1980) The victim comes to see the captor as a 'good guy' even a savior." This condition...occurs in response to the four specific conditions listed below:

- > *A person threatens to kill another and is perceived as having the capability to do so.*
- > *The other cannot escape, so her or his life depends on the threatening person.*
- > *The threatened person is isolated from outsiders so that the only other perspective available to her or him is that of the threatening person.*
- > *The threatened person is perceived as showing some degree of kindness to the one being threatened.*

It takes 3-4 days for the characteristic bond of the Stockholm syndrome to emerge when captor and captive are strangers. After that, research shows the duration of captivity is no longer relevant.



I have been an inmate here at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women for two years after serving three years at Passaic County Jail. My son, who is now 24 years old, is involved in the same case. We have serious charges and a lot of time ahead. We know that we have had to change our lives. I am allowed to write my son and call once a month. I took parenting classes at the jail and have been studying the Bible for five years. Neither of us have had any infractions of the rules.

The first year, I was misinformed and told that there was no such thing as an interinstitutional visit. This was not true: There is a law in the law books that inmates are allowed interinstitutional visits as long as they pay for two guards and transportation. For the chance to see each other for one hour, the price would be \$368.70. When the prison found out I was willing to pay, it took two months for the paperwork to go to our classification board.

My request was denied.

They claimed that I am a security risk even though I am not and have not been a problem inmate. I have been transported to the city of Trenton for medical visits twice. Both times, I neither tried to escape nor did I cause any other problems.

I know that the administration is not happy that I discovered this law because they have not done an interinstitutional visit here in twenty years and have never done one in New Jersey State Prison, which is where my son is housed.

My prison social worker has agreed to give me a video conference visit, but New Jersey State Prison has not even answered this request! They told my son that it is not of any benefit to the inmate. I would have thought that these administrations would want to encourage family ties as long as they are in a positive manner, but I have not seen this at all. I am brokenhearted. I miss my son terribly. I raised him as a single parent.

I ask everyone to pray for us and anyone who can help to please write.

Marianne Brown #420854, EMCF, South Hall  
PO Box 4004, Clinton, NJ 08809-4004

Women Helping Battered  
Women excerpted from; Domestic  
Violence Response Training

Curriculum Nov. 1991 By Jeri  
Martinez) But, what can we do to insure  
that the victim will be safe and secure  
financially? Well, that's a question I am  
still trying to find out.

There is a lot to be said to the  
reasons why a woman stays in an  
abusive relationship. We all need to  
recognize that it is a natural instinct to  
protect our lives. The words of the Great  
Dr. Martin Luther King "Free at last,  
free at last, God Almighty Free At  
Last!"

I am very interested in hearing  
your opinion. Please write to us  
"Perceptions Newspaper" Opinions c/o  
Mrs. Morgan, Edna Mahan Hall, in  
House Mail. We will get your letter and  
even possibly your work will get printed.

Until next time stay safe be  
happy and let go@...

Nadine Andersen is  
scheduled to be  
paroled from the  
Edna Mahan  
Correctional Facility  
in New Jersey in  
October 2003. You  
can contact her c/o  
"Tenacious."



ME

I'M A MOTHER WHO IS DEPRIVED OF RAISING HER CHILDREN,  
I'M SINGLE, A WIDOW, A DIVORCEE,  
I'M A DAUGHTER WHO CAN'T DO SOMETHING NICE FOR MY MOM  
LIKE MAKE HER DINNER, CLEAN HER HOME OR TAKE HER TO A  
SHOW TO SEE.  
I'M A WOMAN LOCKED AWAY FROM THE WORLD,  
A WOMAN LONGING TO BE FREE.  
I'M A LOVER LONGING TO BE LOVED  
AND CHARMED BY A MAN I NO LONGER SEE.  
I'M A LONER WHO LONGS FOR SOMEONE,  
A WRITER WITH NOTHING TO SAY.  
I'M AN INDEPENDENT, CAUGHT UP IN LIFE,  
AN INDIVIDUAL WITH HOPES AND DREAMS  
AND HAVING MY DEBT TO PAY.  
A MOM WHILE MY KIDS ARE AWAY,  
THE NIGHT LONGING FOR THE DAY.  
I'M A POET WITH A BROKEN HEART  
AND VERY LONELY WHILE WE ARE APART.  
I'M A HERMIT WITHOUT A FRIEND,  
BUT WHEN SOMEONE'S IN NEED,  
I'M THEIR FRIEND TO THE END.  
I'M AN INMATE AWAITING RELEASE,  
I'M AN AMERICAN LONGING FOR PEACE.

### CONCRETE GARDEN

AT TWENTY-FOUR, THEY TOOK ME  
MY BOND WAS WAY TOO HIGH—  
I SIT HERE SIX YEARS LATER  
ANOTHER DAY GOES BY.  
WE EAT TOGETHER AND  
DRESS THE SAME  
WE SAY "YES SIR" AND "NO SIR,"  
WE PLAY THE GAME.  
WE ALL WAIT FOR LETTERS  
MOSTLY, THEY NEVER COME.  
WE WANT THINGS TO GET BETTER,  
WE WANT OUR SENTENCE TO BE DONE.  
DAYS SLOWLY PASS, SOMEHOW WE GET THROUGH IT—  
ALONE AND DEPRIVED OF LIFE AS  
WE KNEW IT.  
WE READ, WE WRITE,  
WE LAUGH, WE CRY,  
WE TALK OF THE PAST  
AND DAYS GONE BY.  
SOME SIT THEIR WHOLE LIVES,  
WAITING FOR THEIR MIRACLE PARDON  
AS WE ALL VASTLY GROW  
IN OUR CONCRETE GARDEN.

BOTH BY: AMY ARMSTRONG #96323  
3B/DWCF, PO BOX 392005, DENVER, CO 80239

### My Guardian

My guardian keeps me against my will  
And jots down my actions even when I'm still.  
I'm fed three meals, barely treated when I'm ill,  
But none understands that I've been dealt a raw deal.

My guardian has powers to break me down,  
He often tends to move me around.  
If I attempt to protest or "run off my lip,"  
The consequence is an R-H-U trip.

My guardian sees me as a number not a name.  
When things go wrong, I get the blame.  
I've been criticized and put to shame,  
However I'm much too strong to be driven insane.

I am a strong, proud woman built to endure.  
This seems to make him despise me more.  
He really enjoys making demands,  
Even on subjects he doesn't understand.

He isn't by far one of a kind,  
Many have guardians just like mine.  
He is better known as warden of the jail,  
Being under his wings is a living hell.

My goal now is to strive to be free  
For this guardian of mine is my enemy!

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Almost ten years ago I walked into the system. I hated life and I didn't care about anything. I was wearing a chip on my shoulder daring anyone to so much as touch it. About a year ago I finally became exhausted with holding up my defenses, so I surrendered to a lady named Ms. White. She runs a number of groups, one of which I became involved with, called the Winner's Circle.

The Winner's Circle is a class where we learn about ourselves, where we've gone wrong and how to make it right. When I first started going to Ms. White's class, I was just using it as an excuse to get out of my cell. But as I listened to the people share their problems, thoughts, and experiences, I began to feel like it was me talking through them. I began to accept that I wasn't alone and that there are answers. I began to listen and I gave my all to the groups, and credit to this my move from medium custody to minimum custody. I've learned that no matter who you are, where you've come from, or what you've done, you're still entitled to make a mistake. I realize I still have a lot to learn, but now I am up for the challenge. Today, many of these programs are being shut down. I'm not the only one who can say "we" need them. I can't understand how we are supposed to grow and progress in this place without these important programs. One thing is for certain, God sent me a few angels to guide me to the right path and Ms. White is one of them. She earned her wings.

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## **Women Prisoners Discriminated Against In the State of Oregon**

Women Prisoners in the state of Oregon are now doing hard time at the only women's prison in the state of Oregon: Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF.) CCCF is a more stringent, restraining and violent prison. More so than any of the other facilities the women prisoners in the state of Oregon have been housed in and it has only been in operation for approximately one and a half years. In the eight and a half years I have been incarcerated, a fight between two female prisoners would occur approximately every six to eight months. In comparison, this facility has been open a little over a year and there have been over fifty fights that have occurred. CCCF is breeding violence and aggression and the prison officials are doing nothing to help or prevent this. In addition to the aggressive atmosphere fostered by the facility, the facility itself is not adequate for housing the number of women incarcerated in the system in Oregon. In comparison to the male facilities, CCCF only allows women one third (sometimes less!) of outside yard time. In addition, the women prisoners are not offered the same opportunities as men, such as many recreational activities or adequate facilities. One example of this is the poor quality of food service including uncooked or spoiled meat being served. Another incident regarding the food service was when an inmate had accidentally chopped off the tip of her finger while slicing frozen hamburger meat. The inmate reported the accident and was taken to medical, but the finger tip remained with the meat and was cooked and not taken out until just before they served the meat.

Not only are women at CCCF served rancid or unsanitary meat, they are treated as such by the male guards who often gawk at



female prisoners while they are showering or while they are getting undressed/changing clothes in their cells. Sexual assault/harassment by prison guards are common place. More guards have had to resign or have been fired due to inappropriate behavior with prisoners here at coffee creek. The prisoners are placed in segregation and the guard allowed to continue to work within the facility pending lengthy investigations. In less than ten months there have been at least one incident a month, which is far greater than any other institution I have been housed at. Educational programs which can be for the betterment of prisoners, and prepare them for release into society are few for the female prisoners in the state of Oregon. There are three programs available to women prisoners within CCCF medium housing section and those programs are one computer tech class that teaches the basic computer programs (typing, Excel, Word, and Publishers,) one beauty school and one parenting class. The waiting lists for these programs are long and the prisoners must have at least six months of clear conduct to participate. Not only do the male prisoners have the three programs offered to the female prisoners, but they also have a variety of other programs that we female prisoners can not even begin to wish for. Those programs are: Cabinetry, Welding, Small Engine Repair, Culinary Chef's classes, Prison Blue Clothing factory and Mattress Making factory. Perhaps the reason women prisoners in the state of Oregon at CCCF are fighting one another so often is because the living conditions here are horrible and they are tired of being discriminated against, sexually assaulted/harassed. Oregon DOC officials and CCCF officials are turning blind eyes and deaf ears to the women prisoner's cries for help. In turn, they women prisoners are handling their frustrations by fighting one another, rather than by joining together and taking a stand to change their living conditions. I consider our incarcerations under these conditions to be a

violation of several of our bill of rights as U.S. citizens: Amendment I, CCCF officials are keeping us prisoners from asking the government to correct something we think is wrong, as we are not allowed the right of petition; Amendment 8, the women prisoners at CCCF are being subjected to cruel and unusual punishment which is bordering on torture of our mental, emotional, and physical well being; Amendment 14, we are being denied equal protection under the law. Something should be done to get CCCF functioning more like a prison where the officials care about what's going on, and taking preventative steps to improve the living conditions here at CCCF. So far, little has been done and this environment is being approved or ignored by the higher officials. The superintendent is in charge of the overall operations of the facility at large. On several occasions she has stated she wanted the facility to be run differently, yet the captains, lieutenants, sergeants, and correctional officers working under her have different ideas on how CCCF should be run. I think she needs to start cleaning her big house, because as it currently is, it is a big replica of a Nazi concentration camp.

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